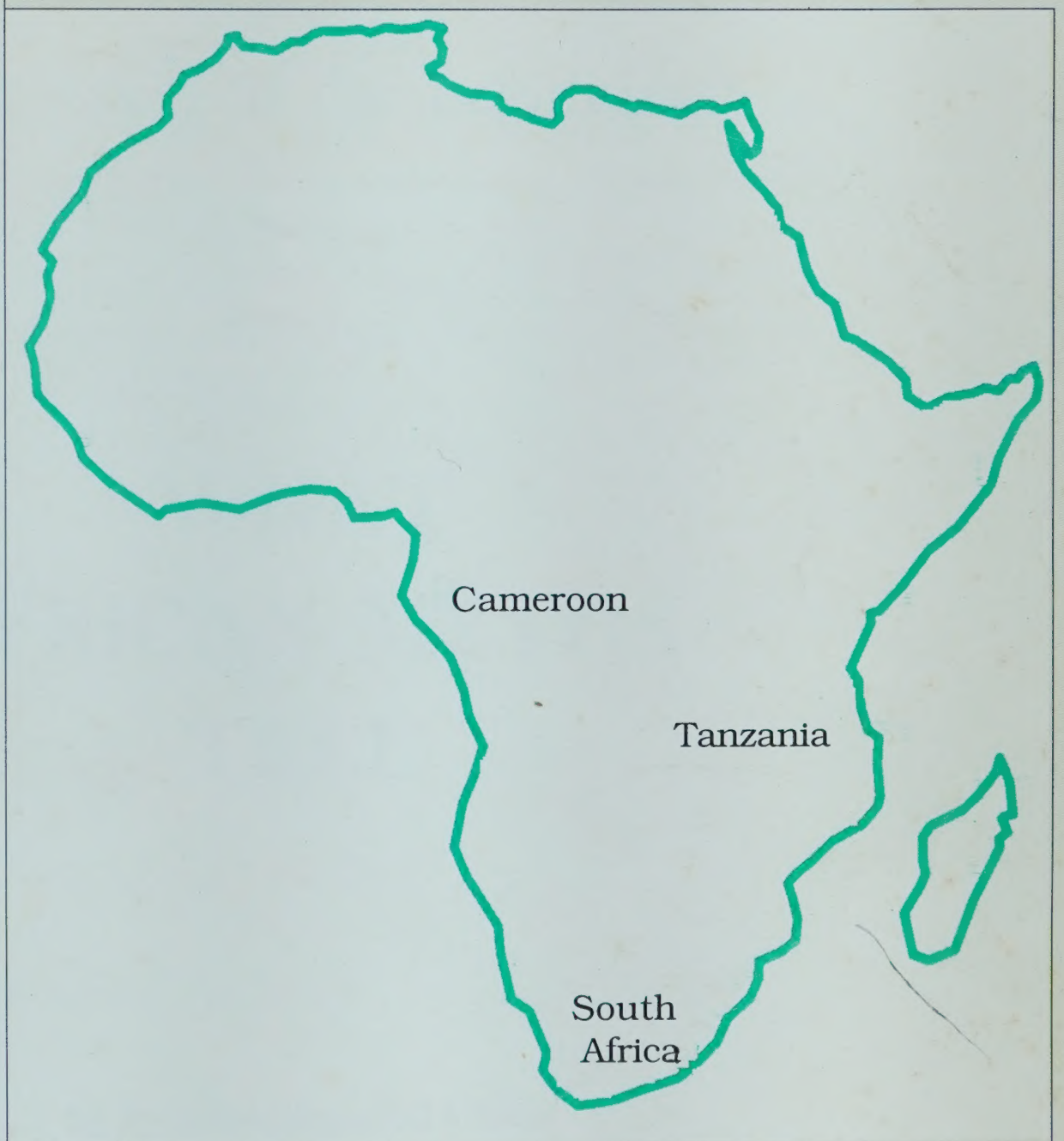


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How was it at the beginning?



WHAT AFRICAN MYTHS TELL

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Introduction:

Myths – Memories of the Past

Every one of us has the three main important questions: WHAT – WHEN – WHY. Children start to ask these questions as soon as they have learned to speak.

These questions were already asked decades and decades ago, even millenniums and millenniums ago, in the very beginning of mankind. The very first men found answers in beautiful narrations, in the myths of prehistorical time. For us remarkable: Even we, men of the modern time, understand such myths of the past.

We call the first human beings primitives. But were they primitive? They had the same fundamental question we have: WHAT – WHEN – WHY. They clothed their answers in the narrative tales of time immemorial, understandable to us, men of modern times.

Were the primitive men as intelligent as we are? Yes, they were!

Africa tells thousands of such old myths. We selected for this book seven of them. We present seven myths of six African tribes; let us rather call them: Nations.

In CHAPTER I we bring four myths about the close connection between God, called Unkulunkulu, Engai, Shapanga, Ntara–Nti, and mankind. Then we add three myths telling of heros of the very old days. These old myths are told by nations who live thousands of kilometers away from one another. But why they are telling the same myths?

In our CHAPTER II we try to answer this last question and give some interpretation of the old myths. Our CHAPTER III shows how such old myths can be used for a Narrative African Christian Theology of today.

We wish for all our readers that they may understand the immense beauty of the past, of the old myths, the memories of time immemorial.

CHAPTER I

Old African Myths

1. Why Engais rope was cut? – A Myth of the Maasai:

Once upon a time, long long ago, Engai, God, gave life to mankind as a mother gives life to her children. So Engai gave life to all and he donated the men the cows to get milk and goats and the sheep for meat and the donkeys to carry luggage.

And God created the trees with different fruits and the grass for the cows, goats, sheep and donkeys so that all had enough food to eat. And God wanted to be for all times connected with the men. So he tied himself with a rope to Leeyo, the forefather of the Maasai.

Because God was so closed to all the cattle grew and grew and the Maasai got rich and richer. The Wanderobe who live near to Maasai became jealous about the Maasai and one night one of the Wanderobe cut off the rope which connected Leeyo with Engai while Leeyo was asleep. Engai withdrew himself deep into the sky. Worries, fighting, even killing started among the Maasai since God, Engai, was not longer with them.

*Narrated by Frederic Sepitek Oleshiro,
Simanjiro/Tanzania.*

2. How the Amazulu came to life? – A myth of the Zulu / South Africa

God whom we Zulu call Unkulunkulu, the old, old, old one, created heaven and earth. Then he gave life to the sons of heaven and to the daughters of heaven. All lived with Inkulunkulu in the village of heaven. It was a good life, full of happiness, in the village of heaven.

Unkulunkulu had a beautiful white bull. He used to ride this bull.

One son of heaven loved the bull as well and became used riding the bull too. Unkulunkulu saw it and warned the son of heaven:

"This beautiful bull belongs to me! I ask you not to ride the bull!" But the son of heaven did not listen to God; he was even not ready to listen. He continued to ride the bull. Unkulunkulu warned him again:

"Stop riding my bull! Otherwise I have to expel you from the village of heaven!" But the son of heaven laughed:

"Unkulunkulu is too old. Now he becomes confused in his mind. He cannot expel me. No other place exists; only this, our village of heaven!"

And he continued to ride the bull of Unkulunkulu

who saw this. Unkulunkulu became angry, very angry. He prepared an opening on the ceiling of the heaven, he grasped the disobedient son of heaven, he bound a rope around his body and he lowered him through the opening down to the earth. Now the son of heaven stood on the earth. He looked around. He saw the bananas bushes. He saw the trees with different fruits. He saw the many animals living in the grassland. He saw the small rivers, full of clear water and fish. He started to like the earth and he cut off the rope which still connected him with Unkulunkulu.

After some weeks Unkulunkulu wanted to see what his son was doing on the earth. He looked down. What he saw? The son of heaven was laying half dead. "What is wrong with him?" Unkulunkulu asked himself. "He has all what he needs, all kinds of fruits and water enough. What is wrong with him?" Suddenly he understood what his son missed. Unkulunkulu called one of the daughters of heaven. He called the most beautiful daughter of heaven and told her: "My daughter, I have important work for you. Your brother, the son of heaven down on the earth, needs you. Become his wife!" The daughter of heaven answered: "What ever you tell me to do I will do!" Unkulunkulu tied the rope around her body and lowered her too through the opening down to the earth. On the earth, the son of heaven woke up from his deep sleep. He saw the beautiful daughter of heaven. He said: "That is the gift of my father Unkulunkulu" and he cut off the rope which still connected the daughter of heaven with Unkulunkulu. From now on the son of heaven and the daughter of heaven lived together as husband and wife. They got children and their children got children and their children got children and so it went on, up today.

Because our forefather and our foremother were the son of heaven and the daughter of heaven we Zulu call ourselves "Amazulu," "The people of heaven."

*Narrated by Michael Kabelwa Sebeko, Vrede/
South Africa.*

3. Shapanga left the village A Myth from the South of Tanzania

Once upon a time, long, long ago Shapanga, God, created the whole world, and also the men, with whom he lived together in one village. It was a wonderful life together with Chapanga in that village. No jealousy existed. There was peace and love because Chapanga was one of the villagers. He had donated fire to the men for cooking the

food. One day some started fire in the grassland. A strong wind spread the fire over a huge area. The men saw how animals died in the flames. They started to kill animals in the grassland by fire; not because they were in need of meat. Just for fun only, just to see how the animals got burned.

Shapanga became very angry. He called the men and said: "I gave you the fire for good use, not for killing animals!" But the men did not listen to what God told them. Some days later God again smelled smoke coming from the grassland. Again Shapanga told the men: "Stop burning animals to death!" But the men continued to kill the animals. Shapanga warned once more: "Stop it! If you continue I shall leave the village!" But the men laughed: "To which place shall Shapanga go? There is no other village, only our village!" And they continued to kill animals by fire.

Next morning God was not in the village. The children were the first to realize it because they were used to greet Shapanga every morning. The children told their parents: "Shapanga is not at his place!" "Do not be worried," the parents told them. "Shapanga is only on a longer walk. Soon he shall be back." But Shapanga did not return, not that day, not the next day and not the next day. Shapanga had left the village.

During the first days all went on well. But very soon some started to complain: "You burned the animals to death in the grassland!" The others replied: "Are you foolish? You are the ones who started the fire!" But there were others who shouted: "Shut up! Why these fighting? Shapanga left us. Let us go and search for him. Come, we climb this mountain there, this high mountain which touches the sky. There, on the top of the mountain we shall meet Shapanga, we are sure.

And the men started their walk. They walked and walked, they marched and marched. They had to cross the country of the lions. The lions attacked them. "Do not attack us," the men cried, "we search for God!" The lions stopped attacking. They had to cross the river of the crocodiles. The crocodiles came to eat them. "Do not eat us," the men cried, "we search for God." And the crocodiles stopped swallowing them. They came to the mountain. They climbed the mountain, higher and higher. They reached the top, but only to realize that even the top did not touch the sky. A strong, cold wind blew on the top of the mountain.

They returned to the village. They told that they had not met Shapanga. Since that day a deep longing for Shapanga was left in the hearts of all villagers.

*Narrated by Edmund Mpangara, Songea,
Tanzania*

4. Ntara-Nti left the village - A Myth from Cameroon

Long, long ago God, Ntara-Nti, was living together with the men in one village. The villagers loved God as children love their parents. They called him: "Our father." It was so good to stay with God in that village. The hearts of the men, of the women and of the children were full of happiness. The women sang happy songs while working. When they trampled maize they threw their sticks higher and higher. One woman tried to throw her stick even higher than the sticks of the others. "Stop it," Ntara-Nti demanded. "You shall throw down all the stars and the moon and the sun!" But the women did not stop. They continued their game.

"Stop it," Ntara-Nti demanded once more. "Otherwise I shall leave the village." "And where shall you go?" The women laughed. "There is only our village. No other village exists." And full of fun they threw their sticks even higher. Ntara-Nti called the elders of the village for a meeting under the palaver-tree and he said to them: "Why do you allow your wife's to play this game? They destroy the whole nature. Command them to stop, otherwise I shall leave the village!" But the elders did not tell Gods command to the women. They continued their work. One was doing this and the other one that. They simply forgot to tell Gods command.

The children realized that evening that God was not at home. They ran to their parents. They told the parents that Ntara-Nti was not at home.

The parents told it to the elders. Ntara-Nti had really left the village. He did not come back. The elders called for a meeting under the palaver-tree. All gathered. All were silent; there was a silence full of sorrow under the palaver tree. Then one of the elders asked: "And what we shall do now? Our people are getting sick, some even died. Ntara-Nti had always the right medicine. But now Ntara-Nti left us." "It is worse," the village chief said. "Since Ntara-Nti left us peace left us as well. There is no peace in our village any more and no peace in our hearts". Again a sorrowful silence covered the meeting.

"We have to search for God", One said: "We may find him on the mountain. They climbed the mountain. But Ntara-Nti was not there. They came back to the meeting under the palaver tree. Again silence lasted in the meeting.

A young man came to the place. He asked permission to speak. He told the meeting: "I am just back from the ocean. I saw the ocean. I saw far away on the ocean a point where the water touches the sky. There, I am sure, we shall meet Ntara-Nti!" All jumped up and ran to the ocean.

All jumped into the canoes. All paddled with all their force. Their arms got tired. Their hands were bloody from the raw paddles. But the point where the water touches the sky moved further and further away. "We shall never meet Ntara-Nti. Let us go back home", one said. All went back to the village, with mourning in their hearts.

Narrated by Edmund Ndzana, Cameroon

5. Litaolane saved the mankind – A Myth of the Basotho in South Africa.

Once upon a time, long, long ago, Kholumolumo, a terrible monster swallowed all people. Kholumolumo was so big that you could not see his tail while standing near his head. All men, all women, all children were swallowed by Kholumolumo.

Only one woman could hide herself in an unapproachable cave. She was pregnant and gave birth to a son whom she named Litaolane, "prophet". In order to protect her son against the monster she hung necklaces with powerful medicines around his neck. Worried about the future of her child she left the cave one night to collect food for Litaolane and herself and to get firewood.

Coming back just after sunrise she was shocked. She could not see her child. But a strong, robust man stood at the entrance to cave and asked: "Mother, my beloved mother, are you and me the only ones? Do no other men, women and children live here?"

The mother answered: "Be silent, my son, be silent. A terrible monster swallowed all. Be silent. The monster may hear us and come to swallow us as well." But the son asked: "Where is the monster? What is the name of the monster?" "My son, be silent," the mother begged. "You can hear the breath of the monster already. Kholumolumo is coming!"

Litaolane went out of the cave. He was not frightened at all. He took his spear and went to meet Kholumolumo. He met the monster. A dangerous fight started. Litaolane tried to kill the monster with his spear, but Kholumolumo was much stronger. Shocked to death the mother saw that the monster had swallowed her son. Litaolane was not dead. He slipped down into the stomach of the monster. He cut his way out with his spear and came upon the main blood-vessel of the monster. Kholumolumo fell down and died.

Litaolane tried to come out of the dead body. He took his sword. But where ever he cut his way he could hear voices: "Why you pierced me? Why you stepped on me? Why you cut off my hand?" Litaolane could hear so many voices. Finally he came out of Kholumolumos body and widened an exit for all men, women and children who were

still alive in the stomach of the monster. That is the reason why all nations came out of the animal.

All praised Litaolane as their savior and elected him as their only chief. Litaolane was a good and just chief and all lived in harmony. But then the time came when some started to claim: "Who is Litaolane? He was never a child! He is not one of us. Better, we kill him!" They convinced the others that Litaolane had to be killed. They dug out a well and covered it with matting.

Then they went to Litaolane and invited him to rest on the new bank which they had arranged for him. He went to the place. But he knew their plan. When all tried to help him to sit down he just jumped over and all fell into the pit they had dug. They tried many ways to kill him. They set fire, but some fell into the fire and died. The rainmakers made hails, but the hails killed the rainmakers. One day a big crowd hunted Litaolane. He escaped as a bird. Young boys went out to hunt birds and one killed the bird which was Litaolane, not knowing that he had killed the saviour of the mankind.

Narrated by Matsele Mafokeng, Bethlehem/South Africa

6. Masala-Kulungwa killed Shingwengwe – A Myth of the Sukuma, Tanzania

Once upon a time, long, long ago all people were amazed to see a large pumpkin growing, near the village. They asked: "Is this really a pumpkin?" They all ran to get their spears. But one of them had his spear at hand and threw it at the pumpkin. A terrible monster came out and swallowed the brave man. Then the monster, called Shingwengwe, rushed to the village and swallowed all the others, all men, women, children, even the cows and the goats. The monster destroyed even the house. Nothing was left. There was a pregnant woman. She had gone with the others to collect firewood. But being pregnant she came back to the village slowly. She saw all houses destroyed. She saw Shingwengwe. She ran away to the cave where she used to dry her firewood.

There she gave birth to a baby-boy and called him Masala-Kulangwa, "the one with marvelous ideas."

One day the son asked: "Mother, why are we alone? Have I not a father?" The mother told Masala-Kulangwa that the monster had swallowed all men, women, children, cows and goats.

"I shall kill the monster," the young boy shouted. The mother kept silent; she knew how determined her son was. Masala-Kulangwa went out. He saw something sliding in the grass. He took his stick and killed the animal. He came to his

mother, singing: "Mother, mother, I have killed the monster!" The mother laughed: "Oh no, you killed a lizard which eats only mosquitoes and flies."

Again the son went out. He saw a big bird, peering at him with very large yellow eyes from a tree. He put a stone in his catapult and shot the stone right between those yellow eyes. Again he came to his mother singing: "Mother, mother, I have killed the monster!" "No," the mother replied. "That is only an owl, eating other birds."

The son did not give up. Again he went out. He shouted: "Shengwengwe, Shingwengwe!" And the monster came. Seeing the boy, Shingwengwe burst out, laughing: "He, little boy, you came to be eaten?" "Oh no," Masala-Kulangwa shouted back: "I came to kill you!" They both agreed to start the fight. Every one built seven defense towers. They agreed to use seven stones only for the fight. When all was prepared, the young boy allowed the monster to throw the first stone. It hits his first defense tower. The stone was a fire stone and set the tower afire. Masala-Kulangwa took refuge in another tower and started to shoot his stone, without any interruption. He shot the monster with his last stone straight in the head. The monster fell down and said: "What a man you are! You killed Shingwengwe. When I am dead cut my stomach!" Masala did it. He took his sword and cut the stomach.

All men, women, children cows and goats came out. Dancing and singing they all praise: "Masala-Kulangwa has killed Shingwengwe! We are all free again!" And the Masala-Kulangwa Song composed:

"All powerful king,

Masala-Kulangwa!

Masala-Kulangwa, our king!

Reign over all of us!

Reign over the whole world!

All-powerful King'

Masala-Kulangwa!"

Published in "The Clever young man and the monster"

*By Max Tertrais, Paulines,
Nairobi, 2000.*

7. The two sons of Ndabe- Myth of the Maasai/ Tanzania

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there lived in a Maasai boma a mother with her daughter Ndabe. Ndabe was not yet circumcised when she got pregnant. Ndabe had a cow which gave birth to a calf. Ndabe loved the calf with all her heart and named the calf Loldipop.

One morning Ndabe started to milk the mother-cow. But how much she was shocked when she heard Loldipop speaking with a human voice: "Ndabe, do not milk my mother. The milk is mine. Stop it or I shall tell all that you are pregnant!"

Ndabe stopped milking the cow. The same happened in the evening, the same next morning. Ndabe was now much frightened to milk the mother-cow. "Shall I die?" Her mother lamented. In what a painful situation Ndabe was now. "Wait up to the night," Ndabe begged her mother, "only then I can tell you my secret." The night came, but Ndabe told her mother: "Wait, wait up to midnight. Only then I can tell you my secret." Midnight came. Ndabe had to tell the mother that she was pregnant and that Loldipop had ordered her not to milk the mother-cow. If she would milk the cow Loldipop would tell all that she, Ndabe, got pregnant.

The mother listened in a perplexed silence. Loldipop was in the same hut. Together with the mother and Ndabe. Loldipop listened what Ndabe told her mother. Loldipop jumped out of the hut. Loldipop ran from hut to hut, from boma to boma, through out the whole country and swallowed down all men, all women, all children. All died in the stomach of Loldipop. Loldipop got tired and rested in a big forest and forgot that the pregnant Ndabe was still alive.

Ndabe gave birth to two sons. They grew up. They started to walk and to speak. One day they asked the mother: Mother, why we see so many empty huts? Where all the people went who lived here?" The mother started to tell them about the monster Loldipop which had swallowed all the others. The boys left the boma of their mother. They saw a snake. They killed the snake and brought it to their mother. They sang: "Mother, mother, this is Loldipop!" "No", the mother answered, "that is only a snake, dangerous because of the poison, but not do scaring as Loldipop." The boys went out again. They saw a bigger animal. They killed the animal. Again they came to the mother: "Mother, mother, this is Loldipop!" "No", the mother said, "that is only a zebra, the shyest animal." During the night the boys heard the roaring of an animal in the forest. They jumped out. They rushed to the place. They fought with the animal. They killed it and pulled it to the mother: "Mother, mother, we have killed Loldipop!" But the mother said: "No, that is only a lion. Dangerous? Yes, but a lion attacks a man only if hungry or in defence."

But, mother, tell us where to find Loldipop?" The boys insisted. The mother started to cry: "My beloved children, you are still so young! Do not look for Loldipop! You might be killed like the others!" But the sons answered: "Mother, you

know how strong we are. We have to kill the monster Loldipop!" "Wait, up the morning", the mother told them. "Then I shall tell you what to do."

Soon after sunrise the mother showed them a big tree and ordered: "You build now eight strong fences around the tree!" The boys built the fences. It took them four days. The mother ordered now: "You sharp eight spears, for every one eight". The boys sharpened the spears. It took them two days. When all preparations were completed the mother started to sing with a lovely voice: "Loldipop, Loldipop, come!" Nothing happened. Again the mother sang "Loldipop, Loldipop, come!". Now they could hear Loldipop, not far a way. Loldipop sang: "Oh, that is Ndabe. Ndabe has children!"

Loldipop came. Loldipop entered the fence. "Now through your spears into the body of Loldipop. Every one of you his eight spears" the mother commanded. And so the boys did. Loldipop died. But before dying Loldipop said to the two boys: "You sons of Ndabe, you are really brave. You did a big job: My body belongs to you. When I am dead, cut the stomach out". And then Loldipop died. The boys did what Loldipop had told them. They cut the stomach and out of the stomach came some cattle for the two boys and two women for every one of them. The boys married the women and they got children. So the boys become the forefathers of the nation of the Maasai.

*Narrated by Saruni Korea,
Somanjiro / Tanzania*

CHAPTER II

An attempt to understand the Old African Myths

1. What are myths?

We selected seven myths. They all give answers to the old basic questions which all men had since the very beginning: WHAT – WHEN – WHY. Since time immemorial men found answers in a unique style, in the style of narrated stories, narrated in myths.

A Myth is a story, told in a special way which originates in prehistorical time. The myths elucidate that even the first men, millenniums and millenniums ago, were able to see not only the nature around them. They had the ability to understand what is behind the foreground, to understand profound realities. As the last profound reality they recognized God.

2. The ancient questions: WHAT-WHEN-WHY

Four of our myths tell of how it was at the very beginning: The phrase "once upon a time, long, long ago" indicates that the prime origin of the earth and of mankind on the earth dates back to time immemorial. But even the very first men understood the profound reality who created all and gave life to all men. The myth of the Maasai tells quite clear that God, Engai, gives life to all men as a mother gives life to her children. In the religious view of the Maasai God combines male and female characteristics.

Also the myth of the Zulu narrates in a very unique way the origin of men as motherly parturition. God lowers the son of heaven through an opening down to the earth; told like the birth of a child leaving the motherly womb, but still connected with the mother by the umbilical cord, the motherly funiculus.

This fact brings another important view: What caused the rope, connecting God with the men,

to be cut? This old question is answered in the myth of the Maasai: a foreigner, a member of the Wanderobe, cuts the rope because of jealousy. The answer is quite different in the myth of the Zulu: the son of heaven, lowered to the earth, cuts the rope of the daughter of heaven, realizing and he cuts also the rope of the daughter of heaven, realizing that she is the most beautiful daughter of heaven, a praise to women at the same time. Underlined also by the fact that the man could not survive on earth without the help of the woman, in spite of all the possibilities he had: Plenty of food to earth and enough water to drink.

The two answers to the question what caused the gutting of the rope, connecting men with God, are answers we meet at any time. Sometimes we say: "This and that is caused by others", as the Maasai-myth tells. "This and that is caused by others". It is easier to say that others caused our misery or what so ever. To confess that we are the ultimate cause is often not so easy. On the other hand the Zulu-myth tells about a proud self determination of the men in cutting his own rope seeing the beauty of the earth. The son of heaven cuts himself the rope which connected him with God. The prime men felt also the conflict between determinations by others and self determination; a conflict which characterize also our feeling of today.

Three myths also keep ancient answers to the old question WHY. From the very beginning the men experienced fateful facts: Natural disasters killed many, epidemics broke out, wild animals were the daily threats. All these malicious events put many questions to the first men. They were understood as man-eating realities, even as man-eating monsters, big, hugh, superpowerful.

The myth of the Basotho in South Africa simply tells that such a threatening creature existed: Khomulomulo. The myth of the Wasukuma knows that such a threat can grow: The small pumpkin grows and grows and develops to the terrible monster Shingwengwe.

But in the very beginning mankind was often saved by brave, charismatic heroes and leaders. The myth of the Basotho names such a hero Litaolane, "prophet", and the Wasukuma-myth gives him the name Masala Kulangwa, the "one with marvelous ideas". In both myths the saviour is elected as the leader. But the Basotho-myth has addition of great importance: The charismatic leader Litaolane is at first admired by all whom he saved. But soon he is seen as a strange and curious person: "Who is he? He never was a child. He is not of our origin. We better kill him!" The one who is different from all the others is soon seen as strange, as curious, even as a doll, as one who should better be eliminated. At the end the Basotho-myth has a tragic point. Unaware a boy hunting birds kills the savior of the mankind who took the body of a bird.

There is another interesting statement in the Basotho-myth: "All nations come out of the animal". What is behind this statement? The answer we might never know. The Myth-myth of the two sons of Ndabe also tells the story about the men-eating monster Loldipop, but in a different way. All men women and children are killed by the monster. But there is a reason: It happened because who copulated with her. Is only Ndabe seen as guilty? And even the reason is given why only she survived: Loldipop got tired and simply forgot her, resting in the forests. Often also we have the feeling that a disaster, an epidemic just forgot us. But at the end the Maasai-myths tell also that out of the body of the killed Loldipop the cattle came and the two wife's for the two sons of Ndabe. Is here a similar interpretation given, that "all came out of the animals"?

3. Why all have the longing for God?

Four myths tell about the primary connections of men with God. Two myths use the cutting of the connecting rope as symbol. But the two other myths give more details.

The Shapanga-myths of south Tanzania and the Ntara-Nti-myth of Cameroon narrate about disobedience of men which caused God to leave "the village of men". Both myths tell how much the men searched for God, but they could never find him again. The old connection was destroyed for ever and "a deep mourning was left in the hearts of men", so the Ntara-Nti-myth or "a deep longing", so the Shapanga-myth.

Disobedience cut off the primary deep connection of men with God. God left the men for ever. The old knowledge of this division between men and God is used as explanation, coming from the old time, why men are longing for God.

4. Do myths bring us back to the origin of mankind?

How far do myth bring us back to the origin of making? We selected seven myths. Our main point of view was equality in the contents.

But we realize another aspect at the same time. the myth about Unkulunkulu with whom the son and the daughter of heaven lived in the village of heaven before being lowered down to the earth is told by Zulu in South Africa. The similar myth of Engai who connected himself with Leeyo is told by the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania. The Litaolane-myth is narrated by the Basotho in South Africa and the similar two myths about Masala-Kulangwa by the Wasukuma in Tanzania and about the two sons of Ndabe by the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania. The myth telling that Shapanga left the "village of men" is told near Lake Nyasa in South Tanzania and the similar myth of Ntara-Nti by the Bamalake in Cameroon.

All live thousands of kilometres away from one another, in different areas of Africa. Yes, the Basotho, the Zulu, the Wamatengo, the Wasukuma and the Bamalake belong to the ethnical group of the Bantu. But the Bantu-Africans started the migration before the birth of Christ (BC). We are not wrong if we date those myths back to the very beginning of the Bantu-family, before the African migration started at about 500 – 200 BC or even earlier. The Maasai do not belong to the ethnic group of the Bantu-Africans. They are Nilo-Hamites from a quite different origin. They tell Bantu-related myths. From where they got such myths? From contacts with Bantu? That might be the case regarding the monster-myth of the Wasukuma and the monster-myth of the Maasai. Both people live not too far from one another. But the Basotho in South Africa tell a similar, related myth and they live thousands of kilometers away. It is the same with the Shapanga-myth in the South of Tanzania and the Ntara-Nti-myth in Cameroon.

Do all those observations indicate that our myths are much older? Then we can say that they have a common origin, dating back to the very far time, to the time before the separation of men to different races. For a proof of the old age of myths see our last heading: final reflections.

Anyhow: Myths take us back very far to the beginning of mankind. They are therefore the precious heritage of all of us and worthwhile to be kept alive.

Towards an Christian African narrative Theology

Here we show only two ways in which to use African myths for an Africa narrative theology.

1. A Christian Version of the Ntara-Nti-Myth

Myths are an ancient heritage, but they can be used to express modern viewpoints as well, even in the Christian proclamation of the Gospel.

In 1882 Edmund Ndzana, Cameroon, changed the old African myth of Ntara-Nti who left the "village of men" to a Christian Christmas story. He even changed the old title "How Ntara-Nti left the village" to "How happiness returned"; fitting historical events into the traditions myth from the time when the first people of his village became Christian, more than 140 years ago. He created a narrative African Theology of today.

Edmund Ndzana tells the Ntara-Nti-Myth as it was told from the old days up to now. But he ends not with the last sentence of the old myth: "We shall never meet Ntara-Nti again. Let us go back home". Exactly here Edmund Ndzana continues.

All went back to the old palaver-tree for a new meeting. Soon fighting started: "It was your wife who started all the problems!" "Not my wife, but yours!" The oldest man of the village interfered angry: "Be silent! Be silent! While you were searching for Ntara-Nti I prayed to him. Then I had a dream. Let me tell you my dream: Dreaming I saw Ntara Nti who told me: I love peace. I hate fighting. I tell you: We should build up peace again. I am sure, when we are doing it Ntara-Nti will return to us! To build up peace again was not so easy. It was not easy for the wife to ask pardon from her husband and it was not easy for the husband and children either. But all tried their best and all realized that laughter returned to the village and hope grew now that Ntara-Nti might come back to the village. One morning the old man called all to the palaver-tree: "Listen to my dream. I saw Ntara-Ntara-Nti again. He told me: Now I can return to the village. But I shall return in a way you never expect."

Hope grew in the hearts of all villagers. Up to midday nothing happened. All went back to their work. The women went back to the fields for planting. The men continued house building and the children herded the goats and sheep outside the village. It was afternoon when the children came running to the village. They had seen strange men, totally white in their faces, with long beards and dressed in long black clothes. Every one stopped work. They all gathered under the palaver-tree.

The strange men came, one asked permission

to speak. He said: "Listen to me! We are sent by Ntara-Nti." "Total nonsense", the village-chief interrupted. "Such nonsense anyone can tell. Where is Ntara-Nti? Tell me where is he?"

"He is here with you", the white man continued. "He is here because you started to love one another again. He sent his son Jesus Christ, and Jesus sent us to bring you this good news!"

From now on the white man lived in the village and they told more about Jesus. There were people on the village who did not listen to them. They searched further for Ntara-Nti. But there were people who trusted the missionaries and listened to them. These people soon asked to be accepted in the community of Jesus by baptism.

"Yes, You believe, you love one another. But you have also to love the people in that village over there, if you are ready for baptism, the missionaries said.

"Those there", the villagers cried. "Never, never, never! They are our arch-animals since centuries. "Also those you have to love", was the only answer. "We shall try our best, the villagers promised.

The first baptisms took place on Chrisman-Eve. On the next day the new Christians left their village, every one with a small present in the hand.

They were ready to go to the neighboring village and to ask for peace. But how they were amazed to see the same procession coming from the other village to them. Also there the gospel of the Christmas-Peace had been proclaimed.

The two groups met and in-between the two villages a festival of peace was celebrated on the first Christmas-Day and all were sure: "Ntara-Nti is again with us!"

2. Listening to the old African Christianity rediscovered

Myths go back into the old time. To prove it we can take the Christian Bible. The first book "Genesis" brings in the first chapters two old narrations about the creation of the world, of the cosmos, of nature and of Adam and Eve, narrated in the style of myths.

The older creation-myth we find in CHAPTER TWO. The text we read today in the Bible was compiled in the 10th century before Christ (BC). The safety factor that this report brings a myth, dating back to a time much older than 10,000 BC, is very high. A redactor or a team of redactor compiled old oral narrations or marration,

already written down, to form the text which we can read now in chapter 2 of our Bible. So we know at least the time when our text was compiled. But we realize other important points as well.

This CHAPTER 2 of the Bible concentrates on the first man, called Adam, and his wife Eve. Important is that the text tells how lonely Adam was among all the animals whom he gave names. Only the creation of Eve by God helped him to become man. Adam, seeing Eve. Recognized: "That is at least bone from my bone, flesh from my flesh" (Gen 2, 23). We see similarities to our African myths which tell us that the man without the woman is not fully man. More important is how God created the first man. He formed him from the soil. But the first man became man only when God breathed his life into him. God donated life! African myths tell that God gave life to the mankind as a mother gives life to her children.

The younger creation-myth in CHAPTER 1 from the 6th century BC tells: "And God said: Let us make man in our image, in the likeness of ourself (1, 26). The man has according to both old myths the life of God in him which makes him to be the image of God.

Here we see a close relation to our African myths telling that "God gave the life as a mother gives life to her children", see the Myth of the Maasai. We understand: The fact that God formed the man is not so important. More important is fact that God donated him his life. From African myths we learn that this life-giving is the main important aspect even in the biblical tradition. Listening to African myths helps us to rediscover the Christian news.

But there is again a defferent message in the Africa and in the Christian tradition: African myths tell us that God had left the men who search now for God. Our biblical tradition tells us that God expelled Adam and Eve from the paradise and so both lost the close connection

with God. But we have in the biblical tradition an amazing view: God is always on the way to man. As soon as the man begins his way to God he meets God who is already on the way to him. African myths end with the sentence: "A deep longing for Shapanga, Ntara-Nti was left in the hearts of the villagers". The Christian biblical tradition brings the good news that God himself is on the way to mankind, really liberating news.

We can rediscover our faith when we compare African myths with the tradition we have in our Bible.

Final reflection: How old are myths?

For the biblical tradition we have historically proved facts: We know for sure that for example the creation-myth in CHAPTER 2 of the book "Genesis" was compiled and written down at around 10,000 BC. But the first known collection of biblical myths dates back to 12,000 BC. Around 1,2000 BC old stories, told in the style of myths and legends were collected; myths and legends of a much older time. Around 10,000 BC such an old orally transmitted myth was compiled form the text which we can read now in CHAPTER 2 of the book "Genesis" in our Bible.

If we refer back to very old times in the biblical tradition we may presume this also for African tradition.

African had for a very long time oral traditions only. Some African myths are not yet written down. Six of our myths which we bring in this book were told to me by individual persons. We can read them in writing in our book, may be, for the first time. But also in Africa old, oral traditions were given from generation to generation. We can be sure: listening to African myths brings us to the far past and we really get to know how all was in the very beginning as our title indicates.

*Bagamoyo, November 2001,
Fr. John Henschel*

